

FRENCH PHOTOVOLTAIC WANTS ITS PLACE IN THE SUN.

PARIS AFP.

« Should we have had the 300 megawatts installed in Germany, we would have produced last summer enough electricity from solar origin to supply the city of Nantes », has declared last Wednesday during a press conference, André Joffre, one of the French photovoltaic manufacturers.

The solar manufacturers have insisted loudly last Wednesday for a French take-off with an ambitious proposal: to install on 150.000 French roofs and facades solar panels grid-connected up to 2010, that means... what already exists in Germany.

Solar energy has worked with full speed in Germany last summer (30% of additional production from January to August in comparison with the same period in 2002). In France, where the average sunshine is 20% higher, the supply has been negligible.

« We have the techniques, it is not a matter of research; it is an industrial question » has insisted Arnaud Mine, Chief executive of APEX BP Solar, subsidiary of BP.

The photovoltaic panels are collecting sunshine to produce electricity whereas those of thermal solar energy are producing hot water.

France has at its disposal since the seventies well-recognized competencies in the photovoltaic field. 90% of the French solar panels are exported. But the French industry is suffering from a non-existing internal market (16, 6 Megawatts installed, less than 10% is grid-connected).

Its part of the world market is decreasing (10% in 2000, 3% only in 2002) in front of the Japanese breakthrough (45% of the market). In Europe, France is overtaken by Germany and Spain.

However the demand exists: « I receive dozens of requests per week, from private individuals as well as from communities but the subsidies are not following » Arnaud Mine underlines.

Private persons and prime contractors are becoming discouraged when facing the waiting lists at the counter of the Agency for Environment and Energy Control...

The ADEME has spent its entire grant budget in one month.

“Everywhere where the solar is taking off, a determined policy has been set up, with favorable purchase tariffs and helps for investments” has underlined Marc Jedliczka, vice-president of the Liaison Committee for Renewable Energies.

In Germany every solar producer is being reimbursed of 46 Eurocents per kWh. The French purchase tariff is 15 Eurocents for the continent and 30 Eurocents for Corsica and Overseas-territories. The connection to the network managed by the state-owned EDF takes months and is expensive.

The French professionals are worried to be forgotten in the Law on energy orientation that has to define early 2004 the French choices for 20 years.

They are claiming for an upgrading of the purchase tariff (60 centimes), a State programme for 300 MW in 2010 and the co-financing of 150.000 solar roofs up to 2010. They are evaluating the additional cost for the community at 150M EUR, thus one euro per invoice and per year.

« In the preparation of the law, the government takes the wind energy into account but seems to ignore the solar energy» regrets André Joffre, CEO of Tescol and vice-president of the SER, on of the French Renewable Energies Union.

“Why such hatred?” he is asking. « The solar is a complementary energy; it cannot substitute to nuclear, but can usefully replace the polluting thermic centrals in a peak period ».

Is it a question of culture? In Germany, the energy market is decentralized and mainly private. In France, there is a large gap between the giant EDF Company and the small energy manufacturers willing to connect to the network.